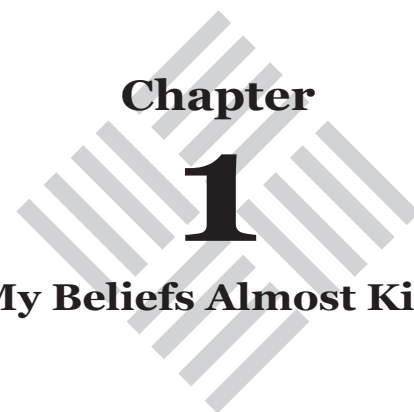




**Chapter**

**1**

**How My Beliefs Almost Killed Me**



“I think I’ll be released today,” I said as I encouraged my husband to return to his seminary classes.

“But I should be here!” he protested.

“Mike, if you stayed with me everyday I was sick or in the hospital, you’d never accomplish anything!” I had finally convinced him.

“You call me if anything happens,” he ordered, then kissed me good-bye.

“I will,” I consented— knowing I’d have to be on my deathbed before I’d bother him.

Quiet time alone with God...what should I read? Perhaps I shouldn’t have told Mike to go, but I am feeling better today. Strange that I never got that blood transfusion the nurse mentioned. I wonder what my blood counts are now. Oh! More kicks from the baby! Funny how the movements are lighter— I wonder what that means...

“Dear God, thank you so much for this child growing



inside me. We didn't know for a while there if You were going to let us keep this little life, but now it looks as though we will. Thank you so much! Yet, I understand that You might not want us to have this child, so please do whatever You want. I love you so much. Amen."



When my mother and mother-in-law died, I comforted myself with three beliefs about God and His relationship to suffering. I believed that all hardships were good in disguise— that God caused or allowed all suffering, and that little could be done to make life better. These thoughts converged to form statements like:

- (1) "My prayers may not have been answered in the way I wanted, but God did answer them. He said no to my requests. I guess God knew that it was best for my mother-in-law to die."
- (2) "I'm sure God had a good reason for making my mother die."
- (3) "All things happen for a [good] reason."

These beliefs worked for me. They were often the only reason I was able to stop crying. They enabled me to not hate God. They explained away the confusion of unanswered prayer. They gave me the courage to believe that, while life was not always easy, every difficult experience was unworthy of much concern. For me, the

conclusion to these beliefs was that I should relax without bothering myself with efforts to limit or end my other sufferings. I thought in this manner because I believed little could be done to end the hardships God desired for me.

These beliefs served as a salve on the open wounds of my injuries. If healing consists of feeling better, then I can say these beliefs worked for me at that time. However, the medicine was about to wear off and the bandages I had applied would soon be ripped off.

"Dad's been killed in a car accident." My sister's voice was frantic. I listened to these words through a hospital telephone as I was admitted for complications following gallbladder surgery while five months pregnant with our first child.

The news of my father's death sent my body into shock. I hit the call button on my bed and passed out. I "coded" and was prepared for emergency surgery. The doctor told my husband, "I'll keep my fingers crossed for your wife." I think he knew there was no real hope for our son. After surgery and 16 blood transfusions, I awoke on life support I was 23 years old; both of my parents were dead, and so was our only child. Job Emmanuel Brost was stillborn one week later.

The months that followed were filled with unspeakable pain. My Christian counselor said I was experiencing Post Traumatic Stress symptoms and a Complicated Bereavement. Complicated was right! I'd buried my mother-in-law, mother, father, and only child in a two and- a-half-year period. I was also enduring significant health problems and was uncertain if we would ever have

another child. I cried almost non-stop.

For some time, my convictions remained unchanged. I thought, “God has a good reason for all this pain. Maybe He’s trying to teach me something, or perhaps we are like the Job of the Bible.” However, it wasn’t too long until my beliefs began to crumble.

### *Beginning to Question*

As the shock of my losses wore off, my conviction that all hardships are inherently good hit a rain shower of endless tears. My pain relentlessly insisted something was terribly wrong. Unlike every other problem I’d encountered, I could not call these sufferings “good in disguise.” I could not logically conclude that the deaths of our son, my father, and my health problems were, in their very essence, good. I began to reconsider my assessment of my other losses too.

When my belief that all difficulties were only beneficial ended, so did my faith in God. “God allowed this to happen! He is evil!” These were the tantrums of my inner soul. They were rarely publicly expressed, but always a part of my demeanor.

I lived in, what was for me, hell on earth. I hated God because I thought He was out to get me. I believed God chose certain people to be “objects of wrath” and others were chosen to be His children. “Clearly,” I thought, “I am an object of His wrath.” In short, *I could not feel God’s presence because I could not feel good.*

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There are no words to fully describe the lonely hell my beliefs threw me into. For several months, I refused to read my Bible, pray, or even talk about God. I informed my husband that he should either leave seminary or find another wife because I would not be a supportive Pastor’s Wife. I formulated an escape plan, which was a plan of suicide. My beliefs nearly killed me.

Eventually, I broke down and prayed, “God, I’ve heard everyone else’s opinion about why all this has happened. I have several theories of my own. Would you please explain this to me yourself?” A few nights later, I began waking in the night with questions about passages of Scripture that had to be answered. Using my husband’s store of literature, the library of his seminary, and the Bible, I began studying the topic of suffering.

It is not as though I’ve managed to unravel the greatest mysteries of the faith, however. Rather, I’d have to say that while my view of God has enlarged, my ability to come to simple conclusions has diminished. But this doesn’t bother me one bit.

### **Facing Reality**

I think my former beliefs served a very important purpose for me: they kept me from acknowledging the truth about my situation. By thinking of my suffering as being only positive, I did not feel as badly injured.

However, there came a day when comfort was no longer what I wanted. I desired God more than the protection of my own intellect. I became willing to reconsider my interpretations of biblical texts that I had never fully studied. I wanted to understand more about who God was

and what His relationship was to my heartache.

I ripped off the bandages I used to comfort myself when they quit working for me. I did this by allowing my heart and soul to question everything I thought I already knew. My journey was by no means one of good feelings. Rather, my pain initially increased as Jesus' blood was finally able to saturate my wounds. But my healing is more complete now than it ever was when I clung to my three beliefs. My prayer is that you will find the same joy and peace I have found.

## Chapter

# 2

### **Are All Hardships Good in Disguise?**

God can bring good out of every bad thing that happens to me (Romans 8:28). This is a truth which has upheld me as I've endured many difficulties. I know that even if I were to lose all my possessions and loved ones, God would somehow prove Himself to be the victor. I used to also believe that since God could provide for me in every circumstance, every bad event was meritorious; I thought of all calamities as good in disguise.

But were the premature deaths of so many of my loved ones good? Were their deaths God's greatest desire? Did God push the OK key and send me a potentially life-threatening auto-immune disorder? Have four pregnancy losses been part of God's plan to make me truly love the two children we have? Are these sufferings the kinds of hardships of which I could say I am sharing in His sufferings (Philippians 3:10), or are they the types of afflictions Jesus rebuked, put an end to, and provided